

My name is Debbie Steele and I am writing on behalf of my nineteen year old daughter Kristen. Kristen is nonverbal and has a significant intellectual disability and requires full time care and supervision. The current proposed budget will not provide any funding at all for day programs for upcoming graduates. Kristen will graduate in 2018. Her high school has prepared a comprehensive and individually tailored transition program for her to help her succeed and thrive when she transitions to an adult day program after graduation. As part of her program, she works in a local restaurant each week helping to set tables and clean placemats. She develops more food service and social skills working in a local senior center helping to serve food as part of the Meals on Wheels program, and also helps out in the cafeteria of an elementary school. She loves being out in the community and working with her peers and members of her community.

The elimination of funding for day programs for all upcoming graduates leaves Kristen and other students like her with no future, and a chance to live a meaningful and happy life. They will be left at home, with no opportunity to use these skills that have been so painstakingly acquired prior to graduation and to participate and be a member of their community. Living an isolated and unstructured life at home is unfair to our most vulnerable individuals. Moreover, this places a tremendous financial and emotional burden on families. Kristen and others like her thrive on routine and structure and a life sitting at home will undoubtedly bring frustration, boredom and a worsening of social behaviors and a loss of skills.

There is no doubt that the State of Connecticut faces budgetary challenges. And it certainly is good news that the proposed budget contains funding to help individuals on the DDS residential waiting list and the development of more residential options for people with I/DD. However, stripping away funding for day and employment services for all new graduates is a grave injustice. We cannot let these most vulnerable individuals be forgotten, and add even more stress and burden to families struggling to raise and take care of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.